

CATALOGUE OF AN
EXHIBITION OF

ETCHINGS

BY

JOSEPH PENNELL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOSEPH PENNELL



FREDERICK KEPPEL & CO.
4 EAST 39TH STREET
NEW YORK

JANUARY 20 TO FEBRUARY 12, 1916

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OFTEN as I come back to New York—often as I look from a high place down on the city—often as from the narrow streets I look up to the climbing buildings round which the clouds gather and over which the steam plume waves—I see new subjects, new motives, new combinations. New York is endless in subject. A noble pile of one year is dwarfed by a formless mass the next; a great arrangement grows from a mean-looking mass.

Always I love to get the composition coming up the bay. This year, however, there is no composition for me, for with the great new square boxes on either side, the silhouette of Broadway is hidden, though the canyon of a street grows finer and finer. The Singer Building has disappeared and the Woolworth Building lost its towering majesty. In these subjects you must, or I must, see buildings as masses that lord it over the rest.

“Whose smile makes glad,
Whose frown is terrible.”

But this is a time of levelling up or down, a time of the contractor, and a time for the town planner, the commonplace jerry-builder, the vulgar machine-made architect who would reduce everything to his own office space ideal, which is that of his patron. So this year from the bay New York is uninteresting: it is all big—all a level line—it does not climb and soar as it did a couple of years ago. I have been drawing and etching these subjects, coming back again and again with a fresh eye—and I know.

But New York does strike the foreigner. I crossed with two professors, one English and the other Belgian. The Englishman foregathered with others of his countrymen, but grudgingly did admit that the lower city was "interestin'." The Belgian stared amazed and only said: "You Americans are not men, you are titans." And truly New York is The Unbelievable City as I have called it. Down Broadway there are endless new subjects. Stand, for instance, at the upper side of City Hall Square on Broadway and look south, and you will see, or you can see, my design of the Woolworth Building. Now I know all of Old Europe, the parts that are left and the parts that are gone, and there is nothing, there was nothing, to compare in grandeur and majesty with this vista down Broadway. Were it somewhere in Europe every one would be staring at it—ogling it—patronizing it—saying the correct things in the guide book about it—things that ought to be said. Here, the guide book says nothing, and save for John Van Dyck, and a few others who have imitated him, no authors have dared to say anything. The cultured tell me I have made Broadway look very fine. Broadway, to those who can see, is the finest street in the world.

And from the bridges one can find endless arrangements. I have only had time to etch two. And nothing in this world was so marvelous as to watch, day by day, last summer, the great arch of the Hell Gate bridge growing from each side of the river till the two arms met in the middle and the subject ceased to exist. Others may have drawn or etched or painted it; I have not seen their work if they did. The drawings and etching I made were not wanted by editors; they were

not pretty I suppose. But I have etched it, and I am glad I did so; it is a record to be proud of. It was so amazing to see that bridge in the building.

And then I have found places where the city piles up in a fashion that would have delighted Claude and Piranesi and Turner. They would have let themselves go, for they would have known that there are points of view from which New York composes and comes together far more finely than any city in Europe, any city of the past or present.

New York is the city of the future. I have tried to show it from Brooklyn and from Weehawken, and from under the trees of Governor's Island. I can find the places so easily—it is so difficult to put down what I find—and time is so short—and the subjects so many. New York is the great city of the modern world, and if I can do something in my work to record its greatness I shall be glad. Some of us have seen its grandeur, its glory, and tried to render it. Some of the people of the world have been good enough to acknowledge our work and to care for it. But the great thing is to see New York—see that the architects are carrying on the traditions of the past—some of them—and making a new city more glorious than any that ever existed. Having seen the city—the unbelievable city—the city beautiful—the mighty city—to show what we have seen on copper, stone, paper, or canvas, that is indeed something to try to achieve.

JOSEPH PENNELL.

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